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W E D N E S D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

- * Secretary-General meets with British Minister on Environment; discusses need to improve environmental programmes world wide.
- * Secretary-General estimates cost of UNTAES for initial six months will be approximately \$128.5 million.
- * Resumed session of Review Conference on Conventional Weapons to focus on technical considerations of land-mines.
- * International Police Task Force for Bosnia almost at full strength; to promote confidence among local communities.
- * UNHCR announces plans to repatriate 2 million Bosnian refugees and displaced people.
- * UNHCR camps for former Vietnamese boat people to be phased out from beginning of July.
- * UNFPA pledges support for Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.
- * IFAD to lend record amount of aid during 1996.
- * Poverty witnesses speak of their struggle at ceremony to set "poverty clock" ticking at United Nations Headquarters.

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On his last day in London, before returning to New York tonight, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali had a full schedule. He first met with the British Minister of the Environment, John Gummer. They discussed follow-up to the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992 and the need to strengthen environmental programmes worldwide, possibly with help from regional organizations. They also addressed the importance of coordination between environmental programmes and related events, such as next June's Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT II) in

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Istanbul, Turkey.

The Secretary-General then met with the Director of the United Nations Association in the United Kingdom, Malcolm Harper, and Sir David Hannay, currently advisor to the World Federation of United Nations Associations. The Assistant-Secretary-General of the Department of Public Information (DPI), Samir Sanbar, also attended the meeting, which centered on cooperation between DPI and United Nations associations around the world.

Later, the Secretary-General attended a round-table discussion at the Royal Institute for International Affairs on the theme of the United Nations: Agenda and Challenges. The discussion was attended by the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, senior foreign office officials, Members of Parliament, writers and university professors.

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It will cost approximately \$128.5 million to maintain the United Nations Transitional Administration and Peace-Keeping Force in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) for an initial six months. The amount will cover costs for 5,000 contingent personnel, 600 civilian police, 469 international civilian staff and 681 locally recruited staff.

In a letter to the Security Council issued today, the Secretary-General outlined the estimated costs and recommended that they should be considered an expense of the Organization and that assessments levied on Members be credited to a Special Account.

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Significant progress would be made if delegates emerged with a "fair idea" of how to resolve major technical issues concerning the detectability and deactivation of land-mines, the Review Conference of States parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons was told yesterday. Some 44 delegates from 50 States parties, as well as representatives of United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations are participating in this week's session in Geneva, from 15 to 19 January. It will focus on definitions, technical specifications and specific prohibitions on the types and uses of land-mines.

Several speakers said they hoped that the "deadlock" at last year's session in Vienna would be broken, and effective steps taken to close divergent technical and military viewpoints about land-mines. In Vienna, there was general agreement that a strengthened Protocol was needed which should bring about an eventual ban on land-mines. However, negotiations stalled on issues of detectability and self-destruction of mines, as well as on the amount of lead time allowed for State parties to bring existing stocks into line with new specifications.

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The United Nations International Police Task Force (IPTF) for Bosnia and Herzegovina has almost reached its full strength of 1,721 officers, a United Nations spokesman said today. More than 25 countries have indicated they will contribute over 1,600 police to the force, which is made up of unarmed police professionals. They aim to promote confidence among local communities by monitoring human rights and training the parties' own law enforcement personnel. Already, 155 officers have been deployed throughout the country, with teams in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Banja Luka, Gorazde, Kladanj and Zivinica.

The Security Council established the IPTF on 21 December 1995 to carry out certain tasks set out in the Dayton peace agreement. The duties include monitoring law enforcement activities and facilities; advising and training law enforcement personnel; assessing threats to public order and advising the Government on how to organize effective law enforcement agencies. Although they will accompany local law enforcement personnel on their duties, IPTF officers will not be responsible for maintaining law and order. The United Nations Coordinator for Bosnia and Herzegovina, who will be stationed in Sarajevo, will oversee the work of the IPTF's Commissioner.

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In a climate of donor cutbacks for development aid, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) plans to lend a record amount of money this year. As its Governing Council opened its 19th session in Rome today, IFAD announced it will lend some \$455 million to 32 projects. That is about \$40 million more than last year and an increase in real terms of around 5 per cent.

The Fund lends to projects in developing countries which help small farmers increase their food output and income. Its real strength is that about two thirds of the money lent comes from the Fund's own resources, assets and investments. However, that aid is now becoming highly vulnerable.

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The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) plans to work with governments to ensure universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women by the year 2000. Executive Director Dr. Nafis Sadik, told the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women that the Fund will work with other UN agencies to inform women's non-governmental organizations and human rights advocates of the Committee's work. She said that should help organizations monitor the Convention's implementation at the country level.

Dr. Sadik said UNFPA was committed to human rights, especially women's rights. The right to health and the right of couples and individuals to

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determine the number and spacing of their children had been instrumental in driving the Fund's policies.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sadako Ogata, today announced plans for the return of more than 2 million refugees and displaced persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Details were announced yesterday, at a meeting of Humanitarian Issues Working Group of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia. Some 40 governments and 20 agencies attended the one-day meeting which also focused on the future of hundreds of thousands of people from the former Yugoslavia being given temporary refugee in several European countries.

Ms. Ogata said that, in many ways, monitoring the peace would be even more challenging than UNHCR's efforts over the last four years to provide one million tons of humanitarian aid in the middle of a brutal war. She warned that the refugees will return only if it is safe and they have something to return to. Under the Dayton peace accords, the UNHCR is responsible for the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will phase out support for Vietnamese boat people. In Bangkok, Thailand this week, an informal meeting of UNHCR's Steering Committee decided that the Vietnamese boat people were not legally refugees. Therefore, the UNHCR should not be responsible for them.

According to a UNHCR spokeswoman, the Agency is very pleased with the findings, which were likely to be endorsed at a formal meeting of the Steering Committee in Geneva 6 and 7 March. As of 1 July, camps for asylum seekers, screened out non-refugees -- the Vietnamese former boat people in South East Asia will be phased out.

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Three people, from Zimbabwe, Bolivia and New York, who are working their way out of poverty came to the United Nations today to tell of the struggle in their communities. They attended a ceremony to start a "poverty clock" ticking in the lobby of the United Nations Headquarters. It has been set up to mark 1996 as the "International Year for the Eradication of Poverty".

The Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, James Speth, said that the event was a cause for both alarm and optimism. Alarm, because each day another 67,000 people joined the ranks of the poor -- an estimated 25 million people a year, most from developing countries and 70 per cent of them were female. Optimism because the international community now recognized the urgency of the problem and what must be done to halt the grim trend.

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